



TAZRIA-METZORA

THE TREASURE OF WORDS

Transforming Harmful Speech into Hidden Gems of the Soul

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Tazria-Metzora

The Torah portions of *Tazria* and *Metzora* continue the discussion of the laws of *tumah vetaharah*: ritual impurity and purity.

A woman who has given birth should undergo a process of purification, which includes immersing in a *mikveh* (a naturally gathered pool of water) and bringing offerings to the Holy Temple. All male infants are to be circumcised on the eighth day of life.

Tzaraat (often mistranslated as “leprosy”) is a supranatural plague that can afflict people as well as garments or homes. If white or pink patches appear on

a person’s skin (dark pink or dark green in garments or homes), a *Kohen* is summoned. Judging by various signs, such as an increase in size of the afflicted area after a seven-day quarantine, the *Kohen* pronounces it *tamei* (impure) or *tahor* (pure).

A person afflicted with *tzaraat* must dwell alone outside of the camp (or city) until he or she is healed. The afflicted area in a garment or home must be removed; if the *tzaraat* recurs, the entire garment or home must be destroyed.

When the *metzora* (the person

who has *tzaraat*) heals, he or she is purified by the *Kohen* with a special procedure involving two birds, spring water in an earthen vessel, a piece of cedar wood, a scarlet thread, and a bundle of hyssop.

Ritual impurity is also engendered through a seminal or other discharge in a man and menstruation or other discharge of blood in a woman, necessitating purification through immersion in a *mikveh*.



Tzaraat:

A punishment for sin,
primarily *lashon hara*—
gossip.

Tzaraat lesions appeared on
surfaces such as skin, hair,
clothing, and even walls.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

What is the most effective way to avoid gossip?



RASHI RULES

1. Rashi assumes his students remember what they were taught and builds his lessons on what he taught earlier.
2. Rashi always seeks an explanation consistent with the basic understanding of the passage.
3. Rashi addresses every textual discrepancy. If there is a discrepancy Rashi has not addressed, it is either not a severe discrepancy or Rashi resolved it a different way.
4. When Rashi quotes a teaching from our sages, he often adapts it to the most literal reading of the passage. When we observe significant adaptations, we ask how these changes help us understand the passage.

TEXT 1

Leviticus 14:34-45

לד. כִּי תֵבֹאוּ אֶל אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר
אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם לְאֻחֻזָּה, וְנִתְּמִי נֹגַע
צָרַעַת בְּבֵית אֶרֶץ אֲחֻזַּתְכֶם.

לה. וְכֹא אֲשֶׁר לוֹ הַבַּיִת וְהַגִּיד
לִפְנֵהוּ לֵאמֹר כְּנֹגַע נִרְאָה לִי בַּבַּיִת.

לו. וְצִוָּה הַכֹּהֵן וּפָנּוּ אֶת הַבַּיִת
בְּטָרֶם יָבֹא הַכֹּהֵן לִרְאוֹת אֶת הַנֹּגַע,
וְלֹא יִטְמָא כָּל אֲשֶׁר בַּבַּיִת, וְאַחֵר
כֵּן יָבֹא הַכֹּהֵן לִרְאוֹת אֶת הַבַּיִת.

לז. וְרָאָה אֶת הַנֹּגַע, וְהָיָה הַנֹּגַע
בְּקִירֹת הַבַּיִת שְׁקֻעָרוֹת יִרְקָרְקוֹת
אוֹ אֲדָמָדְמֹת וּמִרְאִיהֶן שְׁפֹל מִן
הַקִּיר.

34. When you come to the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as a possession, I will place a lesion of *tzaraat* on the house in the Land of your possession.

35. The owner of the house should come and tell the priest, "Something [that looks] like a lesion appeared to me in the house."

36. The priest will order that they clear the house before he comes to look at the lesion. This way, everything in the home will not become unclean. Then, the priest will come to examine the house.

37. And he will look at the lesion. Now, if the lesion in the walls of the house consists of dark green or dark red sunken-looking stains, appearing as if they are deeper than the wall.



TEXT 1

Leviticus 14:34–45

לח. וַיֵּצֵא הַכֹּהֵן מִן הַבַּיִת אֶל פֶּתַח
הַבַּיִת, וַהֲסִגִּיר אֶת הַבַּיִת שִׁבְעַת
יָמִים.

לט. וְשָׁב הַכֹּהֵן בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי,
וַרְאָה וְהָיָה פֶּשֶׁה הִנָּגַע בְּקִירֹת
הַבַּיִת.

מ. וַצֹּה הַכֹּהֵן וַחֲלִצּוּ אֶת הָאֲבָנִים
אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶן הִנָּגַע, וְהִשְׁלִיכוּ אֹתָהֶן
אֶל מַחוּיֵץ לְעִיר אֶל מְקוֹם טָמֵא.

מא. וְאֵת הַבַּיִת יִקְצֹעַ מִבַּיִת סָבִיב,
וְשִׁפְכוּ אֶת הָעֶפֶר אֲשֶׁר הִקְצוּ אֶל
מַחוּיֵץ לְעִיר אֶל מְקוֹם טָמֵא.

38. Then, the priest will leave the house through the entrance and quarantine the house for seven days.

39. The priest will return on the seventh day and look [at the house]. [If] the lesion has spread in the walls of the house,

40. The priest will order that they remove the stones upon which the lesion is [found], and they will discard them in an unclean place outside the city.

41. He will scrape out the house from the inside and all around, and the [mortar] dust from his scrapings will be discarded in an unclean place outside the city.

TEXT 1

Leviticus 14:34–45

מב. וְלָקְחוּ אֲבָנִים אֲחֵרוֹת
וְהִבִּיאוּ אֶל מַסַּח הָאֲבָנִים, וְעָפָר
אֲחֵר יִקַּח וְטָח אֶת הַבַּיִת.

מג. וְאִם יָשׁוּב הַנֶּגַע וּפָרַח בַּבַּיִת
אַחֵר חָלַץ אֶת הָאֲבָנִים וְאַחֲרֵי
הַקְצוֹת אֶת הַבַּיִת וְאַחֲרֵי הַטּוֹחַ.

מד. וּבָא הַכֹּהֵן וְרָאָה וְהִנֵּה פִשָּׁה
הַנֶּגַע בַּבַּיִת, צָרַעַת מְמַאֲרַת הִיא
בַּבַּיִת טָמֵא הוּא.

מה. וְנָתַן אֶת הַבַּיִת, אֶת אֲבָנָיו
וְאֶת עֵצָיו וְאֶת כָּל עָפָר הַבַּיִת,
וְהוֹצִיא אֶל מְחוּץ לְעִיר אֶל
מָקוֹם טָמֵא.

42. And they will take other stones and bring them as replacements for those stones. And the priest will take other [mortar] dust and plaster the house.

43. If the lesion returns and erupts in the house after he removed the stones and after the house was scraped all around and plastered,

44. The priest will come and look [at it]. Now, [if] the lesion in the house has spread, the lesion in the home is a malignant *tzaraat*: the house is unclean.

45. The priest should demolish the house, its stones, its wood, and all the [mortar] dust of the house, and take [them] to an unclean place outside the city.

TEXT 2A

Rashi, ad loc.

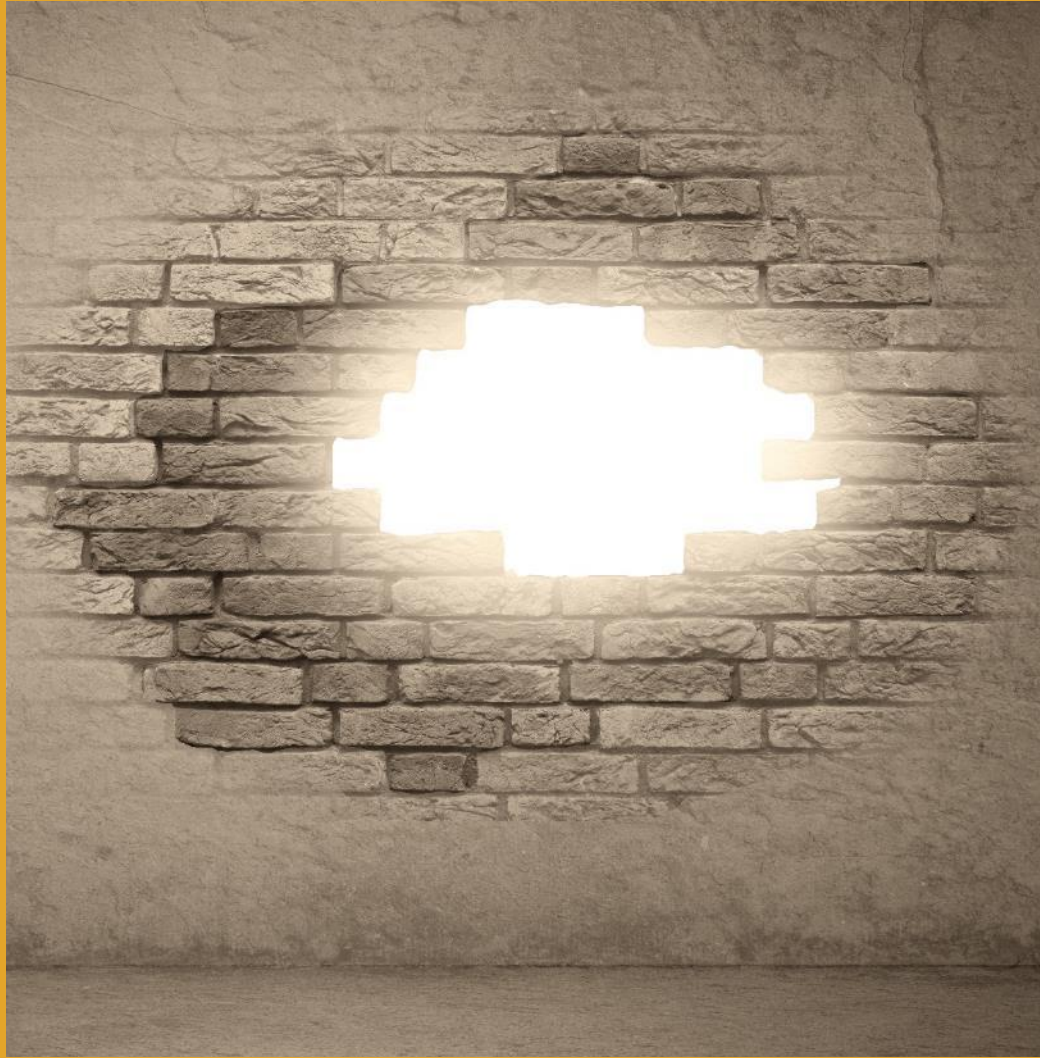
THE RASHI

"וְנָתַתִּי נֶגַע צָרַעַת".

בְּשׂוֹרָה הִיא לָהֶם שְׁהִנָּגְעִים בָּאִים עֲלֵיהֶם. לְפִי שְׁהִטְמִינוּ אֱמֹרִיִּים
מִטְמוֹנִיּוֹת שֶׁל זָהָב בְּקִירוֹת בְּתֵיכֶם כָּל אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה שֶׁהָיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל
בְּמִדְבָּר, וְעַל יְדֵי הַנֶּגַע נוֹתֵץ הַבַּיִת וּמוֹצֵאן.

"And I will place a lesion of *tzaraat*:"

The notification that they will be struck by lesions is a happy tiding. This is because the Amorites concealed treasures of gold in the walls of their homes for the forty years the Jews were in the desert. When homeowners demolished their homes due to lesions, they found the treasure.



Finding *tzaraat* on the walls was a blessing in disguise, as demolishing homes revealed hidden treasures left by the Amorites.

TEXT 2B

Midrash, Vayikra
Rabah 17:6

יכתוב: "ונתתי נגע צרעת".

תני רבי תיא: וכי בשורה היא להם
שנגעים באים עליהם?

תני רבי שמעון בן יוחאי: כיון
ששמעו כנענים שישראל באים
עליהם, עמדו והטמינו ממונם בבתים
ובשדות.

אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: אני הבטחתי
לאבותיהם שאני מכניס את בניהם
לארץ מלאה כל טוב, שנאמר:
"ובתים מלאים כל טוב" (דברים ו,
יא), מה הקדוש ברוך הוא עושה?
מגרה נגעים בביתו והוא סותרו
ומוצא בו סימא.

The passage states, "And I will place a lesion of *tzaraat*."

Rabbi Chiya asked, "Is being struck by lesions a good tiding?"

Rabbi Shimon, son of Yochai, explained: When the Canaanites heard that the Jews were coming to Israel, they hid their money in the houses and the fields.

G-d said, "I promised their ancestors that I would bring their descendants into a land filled with good, as it is written, 'And houses filled with all goodness' (Deuteronomy 6:11)." What did G-d do? He afflicted the house with lesions, and [when] the owner demolished the house, he found a treasure.

TEXT 2B

Midrash, Vayikra
Rabah 17:6

וכי מי בא ואומר לכנענים שישראל
נכנסין לארץ?

אמר רבי ישמעאל בר נחמן: שלש
פרוזדיגמאות שלח יהושע אצלם,
הרוצה לפנות פנה, להשלים שלים,
לעשות מלחמה יעשה.

But who told the Canaanites that the Jews were
about to enter the land?

Rabbi Yishmael, the son of Rabbi Nachman,
answered, "Joshua sent three letters of warning.
(A) If you want to vacate the land, vacate. (B) If
you want to make peace with us, sue for peace.
(C) If you want to make war, come make war."

All the land's inhabitants hid their valuables because they were afraid the Jews would confiscate them as spoils of war.



QUESTIONS ON RASHI

1. Why did Rashi claim it was only the Amorites?
2. Why did the Amorites hide their treasure forty years before the Jews arrived in Israel and not just shortly before they arrived?
3. What tipped off the Amorites forty years earlier that the Jews were coming?



The miraculous Exodus and splitting of the Reed Sea spread worldwide, warning the nations living in Israel that the Jews were coming.

TEXT 3A

Exodus 15:15

אָז נִבְהָלוּ אֱלֹפֵי אֶדֹם אֵילֵי מוֹאָב
יֶאֱחָזְמוּ רָעַד, נִמְגּוּ כָּל יֹשְׁבֵי כְנָעַן.

Then, the chieftains of Edom were startled,
and trembling seized the powerful men of
Mo'ab; all the inhabitants of Canaan melted.

TEXT 3B

Rashi, ad loc.

אָמְרוּ: עָלֵינוּ הֵם בָּאִים, לְכַלּוֹתֵינוּ וּלְיַרֵּשׁ
אֶת אֶרְצֵנוּ.

They said, "The Jews are coming upon us to annihilate us and take possession of our land."

ANSWERS ON RASHI

2. The Amorites hid their treasures forty years before the Jews arrived because they expected the Jews to enter Israel quickly after the Exodus, not realizing it would take forty years.
3. The Amorites were tipped off when they heard about the Splitting of the Sea, which made them fear the Jews' arrival and prepare for their eventual defeat.

TEXT 4

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 32, p. 93*

לאחרי שראו שבני ישראל מתעכבים במדבר משך
זמן רב, אין מקום להטמין ממונם כו' עד שיתברר
להם שבני ישראל מוכנים ליכנס בארץ בפועל.

Once they saw that the Jews were delayed for a protracted period in the desert, they had no reason to keep their money hidden. [They would not worry about it] until it became clear that the Jews were about to enter the land.

ANSWERS ON RASHI

1. All the nations who had resided in Israel forty years earlier had buried their treasure at that time. However, when the Jews' arrival was delayed, all nations besides for the Amorites reclaimed and enjoyed their wealth.

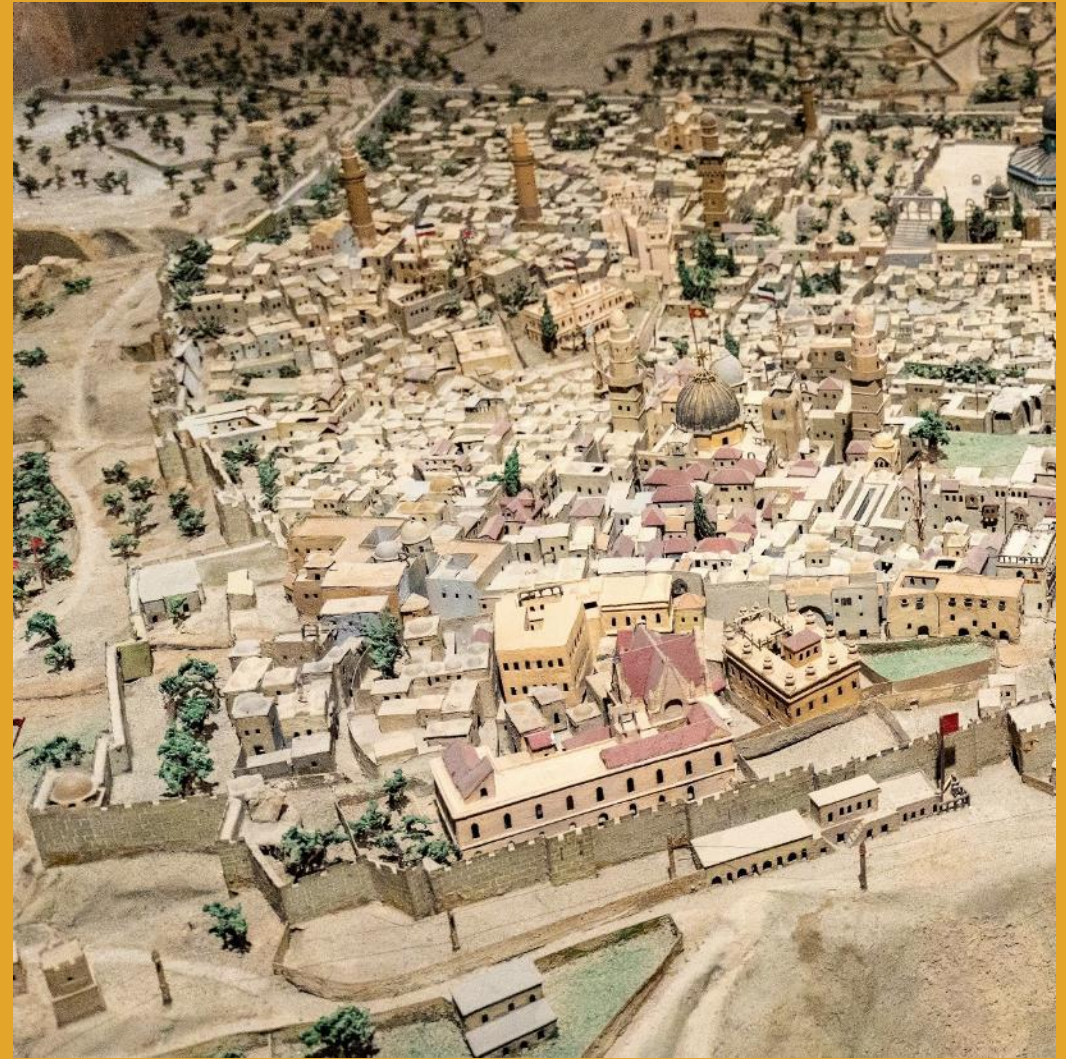
TEXT 5A

Genesis 15:16

וְדֹר רְבִיעִי יָשׁוּבוּ הֵנָּה, כִּי לֹא שָׁלֵם עֲוֹן
הָאֱמֹרִי עַד הֵנָּה.

The fourth generation will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites will not be complete until then.

The Jews needed to wait to enter the land because the nations living there still had four generations of merit left before they became unworthy.



TEXT 5B

Rashi, ad loc.

"כי לא שלם עון האמורי". להיות משתלח
מארצו עד אותו זמן. שאין הקדוש ברוך הוא
נפרע מאומה עד שתתמלא סאתה.

"For the iniquity of the Amorites will not be complete." They would not deserve to be sent out of their land until then. This is because G-d does not punish a nation until its measure is full.



The Amorites ran out of merit first, and were therefore conquered first.

TEXT 6

*Rabbi David Pardo,
Maskil LeDavid,
Genesis 15:16*

שהאמורי נתמלא סאתם תחלה לכולם, שהרי
כבשו משה. והשאר לא נכבשו עד אחר זמן
בימי יהושע.

The measure of the Amorites filled before the others. This is why Moses captured their lands, while the other nations were not conquered until later in Joshua's reign.

TEXT 7

*Maimonides,
Mishneh Torah,
Hilchot Tumat
Tzaraat 16:10*

וְזֶה הַשְּׁנוּי הָאֶמּוּר בַּבְּגָדִים וּבַבְּתִים, שֶׁקָּרָאתוֹ תוֹרָה צָרַעַת בְּשִׁתּוֹפוֹת
הַשֵּׁם - אֵינוֹ מִמְּנֶהֱגוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, אֲלָא אוֹת וּפְלֵא הָיָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּדִי
לְהַזְהִירָן מִלְּשׁוֹן הָרַע . . . וַיִּצְטָרַע וַיִּהְיֶה מִבְּדָל וּמִפְּרָסָם לְבַדּוֹ עַד
שֶׁלֹא יִתְעַסֵּק בְּשִׂיתָת הָרָשָׁעִים שֶׁהוּא הַלִּיצָנוֹת וְלְשׁוֹן הָרַע.

The change that affected clothes and houses, which the Torah described with the general term *tzaraat*, is not a natural occurrence. Instead, it is a sign and a wonder prevalent among the Jewish people to warn them against lashon hora, sinful speech. . . . *Tzaraat* isolates the gossipers, making it known that they must remain alone to abstain from the conversations of the wicked, which are folly and harmful speech.

People rarely gather with the intent to gossip and mock others; it usually happens unintentionally through thoughtless speech.



TEXT 8A

Maimonides, Ibid.

וְזֶה דֶּרֶךְ יְשִׁיבַת הַלְצִים הָרָשָׁעִים. בַּתְּחִלָּה מֵרַבִּין בְּדַבְּרֵי הַבָּאִי . . . וּמֵתוֹךְ
כֶּךָ בָּאִין לְסַפֵּר בְּגִנוּת הַצְדִּיקִים . . . וּמֵתוֹךְ כֶּךָ יִהְיֶה לָהֶן הֶרְגֵּל לְדַבֵּר
בְּנִבְיָאִים וּלְתַת דּוֹפֵי בְּדַבְּרֵיהֶם . . . זֶה הִיא שִׁיחַת הָרָשָׁעִים שְׂגוֹרָמַת לָהֶן
יְשִׁיבַת קֶרְנוֹת וַיְשִׁיבַת כְּנִסְיוֹת שֶׁל עַמִּי הָאָרֶץ וַיְשִׁיבַת בְּתִי מִשְׁתָּאוֹת עִם
שׁוֹתֵי שֵׁכָר.

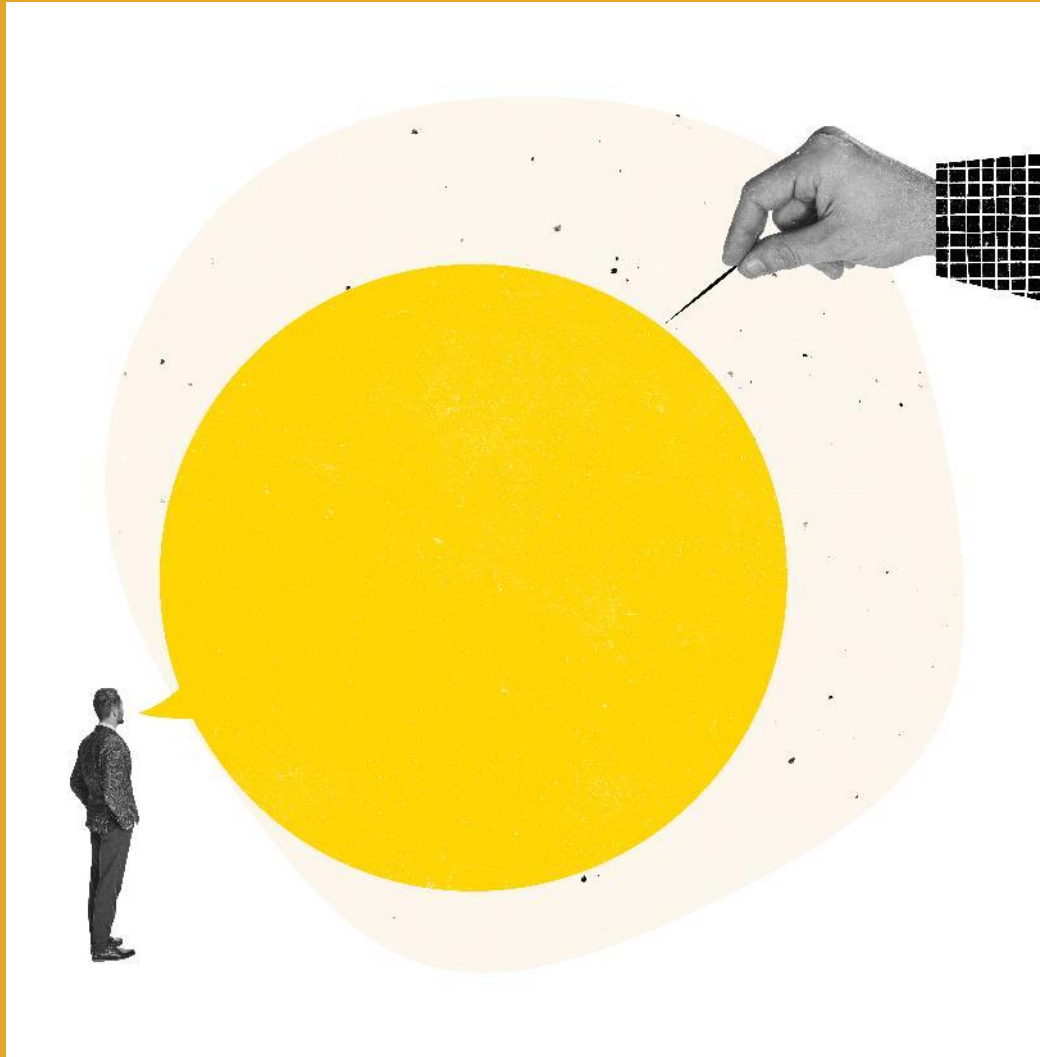
This is the path that is followed by the gathering of wicked fools: They begin by speaking excessively about empty matters . . . then, they come to speak negatively of the righteous. . . . Finally, they become accustomed to speaking against the prophets and casting aspersions on their words. . . . Thus, the speech of the wicked is caused by loitering on street corners, frequenting assemblies of commoners, and spending time at the parties of drunkards.

TEXT 8B

Proverbs 10:19

בְּרֹב דְּבָרִים לֹא יִחַדֵּל פֶּשַׁע, וְחֹשֶׁךְ
שִׁפְתָּיו מִשְׁכִּיל.

Sin is unavoidable when there are many words; [thus] the wise seal their lips.



Idle talk often leads
to sinful speech.

TEXT 9

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Hayom
Yom, 16 Cheshvan*

המחשבה היא לבוש ומשרת השכל והמדות. בשעה אשר אין לה שירות בשכל או במדות, גם אז פועלת פעולתה לחשוב ולהרהר, אבל פעולתה לא לבד שאינה תוכנית, אלא היא גם פרועה לשמצה.

ומבואר כי סיבת המחשבות זרות או רעות הוא די פוסטקייט פון קאפ, דכאשר השכל עסוק אז יש להמחשבה מה לשרת ואין מקום למחשבות של שטות והבל שאין בהם ממש.

Thought is a vehicle and servant of intellect and emotions. Even when it does not serve intellect or feelings, it continues to function, think, and meditate. However, this activity is not only devoid of content but also open to depravity.

It is explained that alien or evil thoughts are caused by the mind's emptiness. When the mind is occupied, the thought has something to serve, and there is no room for stupid and vain thoughts devoid of substance.

IDLE SPEECH: THE NATURAL REASON

When the mind is empty of directed thought, it fills with meaningless thoughts, which leads to idle speech.

TEXT 10A

*Rabbi Bachya ben
Asher ibn Halawa,
Commentary on the
Torah, Genesis 15:16*

עון האמורי - עון האמירה.

The sin of the Amorite is the sin of
amirah—speech.

אִמּוֹרִי — Amorite

EMORI

אִמִּירָה — Speech

AMIRA

The Amorites indulged in and
represented sinful speech.

IDLE SPEECH: THE MYSTICAL REASON

The *Emori kelipah* fuels sinful speech but can only enter our minds when we grant it access by allowing in aimless thoughts. These thoughts result in sinful speech.

TEXT 10B

*Rabbi Shneur
Zalman of Liadi,
Sefer Hamaamarim
5563:1, p. 83*

פירוש אמורי הוא הדברים בטילים
ומחשבות זרות שיש בישראל, כי "סימן
לשטות מילין" (זהר ג, קצג ב) שהוא
מסטרא אחרא שמבלבלים את ישראל.

ולאו דוקא דברים בטילים, כי אם אף
מחשבות זרות גם כן בכלל. כי אמירה הוא
בלב והוא אף מחשבות זרות שחושב דברים
בטילים וזרים שלא לה' המה. שזהו בחינת
אמורי, שהוא לשון שעושה לאמר תמיד.
והוא המלך זקן וכסיל שברוב דברים לא
יחדל כו'. והוא המבלבל את ישראל להרהר
ולדבר במחשבות זרות ודברים בטילים.

וצריכים ליקח מן האמורי שלא יהרהר
במחשבות זרות ודברים בטילים כי אם
יחשוב ויהרהר תמיד את האמירה של
הקדוש ברוך הוא.

The *Emori* represent aimless chatter and foreign thoughts in Israel. "[Speaking] too many words indicates stupidity" (*Zohar* III, p. 193b). The *Emori* [represent energy that] hails from the wrong side [the side of impure energies] that disturb Israel.

The *Emori* do not merely drive us to aimless talk; they also drive us to foreign thoughts. All speech begins in the heart, with the mind thinking mindless thoughts that are foreign to Jews because they don't belong to G-d. The word *Emori* [which is in the current tense] implies constancy; it refers to an impure energy that drives us to constant chatter. The "ancient insane king" traps us into thinking foreign thoughts and speaking empty words, for sin is the inevitable companion of too many words.

We must remove this power from the *Emori* by deliberately avoiding foreign thoughts and empty words. Instead, we must constantly think G-dly words.

Our sages promoted silence, and warned that excessive speech leads to empty chatter which becomes negative chatter.



TEXT 11A

Mishnah, Avot 1:17

שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּנוֹ אֱמִילֵי: כָּל יְמֵי גִדְלָתִי בֵּין הַחֲכָמִים, וְלֹא מָצָאתִי
לְגוֹף טוֹב מִשְׁתִּיקָה, וְלֹא הַמְדַּרְשׁ עֶקֶר אֶלָּא הַמַּעֲשֶׂה, וְכָל
הַמְרֻבָּה דְּבָרִים מְבִיא חֵטָא.

Shimon, the son of Gamliel, would say: I was raised among Torah scholars all my life, and I have found nothing better for the body than silence. Speech is not essential; deed is critical. Those who speak excessively bring on sin.

TEXT 11B

Talmud, Megilah 18a

— כי אתא רב דימי אמר: אמרי במערבא
מלה בסלע, משתוקא בתרין.

When Rabbi Dimi arrived [in Babylon], he said, "In the West [in Israel] they say, 'A word for one coin, silence for two coins.'"

TEXT 11C

*Maimonides,
Mishneh Torah,
Hilchot Tumat
Tzaraat 16:10*

אֲבָל שִׁיחַת כְּשִׁירֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵינָה אֶלָּא בְּדַבְרֵי
תּוֹרָה וְחִכְמָה. לְפִיכָךְ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא עוֹזֵר עַל
יָדוֹ וּמְזַכֶּה אוֹתָן בָּהּ.

In contrast, the speech of proper Jewish people is always focused on the words of Torah and wisdom. Therefore, G-d assists in this endeavor and grants them merit because of it.



While silence neutralizes the *Emori*, positive speech countermands the *Emori*.

Finding treasures in the homes of great transgressors demonstrates the power of transformation.

We transform the *Emori kelipah* and uncover the greatest treasures when we opt for positive speech.



TEXT 12

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 32, p. 97*

אמנם לאידך, דוקא בבתי האמוריים נמצאו "מטמוניות של זהב".

כי תכלית הכוונה בענין הנגעים אינה רק לבטל ולשלול "שיחת הרשעים" אלא להפוך את כח הדיבור של האדם. שתמורת "אמורי" דלעומת זה תהיה אמירה ודיבור דקדושה, "לקחתי מיד האמורי" (בראשית מח, כב). שעל ידי אמירות ודיבורים טובים וקדושים מגלים ה"מטמוניות" שבנפש.

Conversely, the hidden treasures of gold were found uniquely in the Amorite homes.

This is because the ultimate purpose of the *tzaraat* lesions was not merely to neutralize and prevent the chatter of the wicked. Rather, it was to transform the human power of speech. Rather than negative speech, we should have words and conversations about holy topics. [As Jacob said] "I snatched it from the Amorites" (Genesis 48:22). Words and speech that are good and holy reveal the hidden treasures of the soul.

KEY POINTS

1. Lesions called *tzaraat* would appear on the walls of people who engaged in sinful speech. If these lesions persisted despite all efforts to clean them, the house had to be demolished.
2. When the house was demolished, homeowners often found hidden treasures buried there by the nations who had resided in Israel before the Jews arrived.
3. Among these nations, the Amorites were the first to lose their land because their sins were particularly vile. Their primary sin was sinful speech. These treasures were found primarily in their homes.
4. It is ironic that the greatest treasures were buried in the homes of the greatest offenders. It teaches us that when we transform negative speech into positive speech, we uncover hitherto hidden gems of the soul.
5. One way to avoid negative speech is to walk away. A better way is to direct the mind constantly to constructive and holy subjects, which utilizes the power of transformation.

